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## Cooperation of the Family, Parish and School in the Eucharistic Formation of the Child on the Example of the Church in Poland

The article discusses preparation for First Holy Communion as a joint work of all three catechetical environments – family, parish and school, highlighting the diverse tasks current on each of them. The necessity of a coherent effort for children who are preparing for full participation in the Eucharist is presented as a prerequisite for effective religious formation, which will not end with the day of the celebration of receiving Jesus the Eucharist for the first time, but will usher in a new quality of life for the child and his loved ones and enable the formation of the Eucharistic attitudes lived out in everyday life. After showing the program assumptions of initiation catechesis in Poland and outlining the tasks of the family, parish and school in preparing children for the First Holy Communion, he points out the practical possibilities of their implementation. The sources for the reflection will be the documents of the universal Church and in Poland, with particular emphasis on the teaching relating to Eucharistic formation and the program assumptions of parish catechesis and school teaching of Roman Catholic religion. After presenting the issue, conclusions will also be offered for the effective implementation of the theoretical assumptions.

**Key words:** preparation for First Holy Communion, cooperation of catechetical communities, catechetical communities, catechesis in the family, catechesis in the parish.

“Preparing children for the sacrament of penance and reconciliation and the Eucharist should take place in close cooperation between pastors and catechists with parents”<sup>1</sup>. The position expressed three years

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<sup>1</sup> Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, *Wskazania dotyczące przygotowania dzieci do przyjęcia i przeżywania sakramentu pokuty i pojednania oraz Pierwszej Komunii*

ago in the instructions of the Polish Episcopal Conference regarding the preparation of children to receive and experience the sacrament of penance and reconciliation and First Holy Communion does not differ from the previous assumptions of Eucharistic formation. Parents, as the first catechists and educators in the faith, play a leading role in this matter. In turn, the parish, as an inspirer and propagator of catechesis<sup>2</sup>, remains the environment of this formation and the community in which families experience their faith together. Since religion classes returned to schools in Poland in 1990, this institution has also had its tasks in preparing children for full participation in the Eucharist.

This article will attempt to demonstrate the need for coherent actions by the family, parish and school for children who are preparing for full participation in the Eucharist. The sources for the reflection will be documents of the universal Church and churches in Poland, with particular emphasis on teaching relating to Eucharistic formation. First, the family as an environment of Christian initiation will be presented, followed by the role of the parish in Eucharistic formation. The school and its program assumptions relating to the Eucharistic life will be presented as the third preparation environment. After presenting these issues, the optimal model of cooperation between communities and conclusions for the effective implementation of theoretical assumptions will be presented.

## Family as the environment of Christian initiation

Pope John Paul II, writing about the educational role of parents, described them as the first preachers of the Gospel to children. He emphasized that this activity is two-way, because it also addresses themselves, strengthening them as parents. As he claimed, “by praying with children and reading the Word of God with them, by including children through gradual Christian initiation into the Body – Eucharistic and ecclesial – of Christ, they become parents in full, not only parents of physical life, but also of that which through the rebirth of the Spirit The Holy Spirit flows from the Cross and the Resurrection

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*Świętej* (29.08.2020), <https://opoka.org.pl/News/Polska/2020/przygotowanie-dzieci-do-sakramentu-pokuty-i-pierwszej-komunii-swietej>, [henceforth: *Indications of the Polish Episcopal Conference...*].

<sup>2</sup> See See John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Catechesi tradendae*, Rome 1979, ed. Polish: Warsaw 1980 (henceforth: CT), 67.

of Christ<sup>3</sup>. To become catechists for their own children, parents must first be witnesses of the faith themselves. The way faith is experienced in the family is crucial for the religious formation of children – where parents fulfill their obligations to accept and raise their children as Catholics, children's baptism is something natural. There are also manifestations of religiosity between the sacrament of baptism and further initiation – preparation for full participation in the Eucharist.

Among the various terms assigned to the family, the well-known one refers to it as a domestic Church. The family becomes a domestic church when it fulfills its specific tasks, allowing it to be seen not only as the smallest and basic social group, but also as a community of faith. These tasks include creating a community of people, serving life, participating in the development of society and participating in the life and mission of the Church<sup>4</sup>. There are also some talks about a family catechumenate, which is important for religious formation in the family. The catechetical influence of the family is not a didactic process in the same sense as school religion classes. It has the character of mystagogy, Christian initiation, which first involves shaping the appropriate atmosphere and appropriate attitudes<sup>5</sup>. The child's ability to turn to God in prayer and participate in the liturgy will largely depend on the experiences the child gains in the family. "Therefore, an important goal of the prayer of the domestic Church is to create conditions for children to be naturally introduced to liturgical prayer, appropriate for the entire Church, both by preparing for it and by extending it to personal, family and social life. Hence the need for the gradual participation of all family members in the Eucharist, especially on Sundays and church holidays, and in other sacraments, especially in the sacraments of Christian initiation of children<sup>6</sup>.

In many respects, the family has opportunities that no other community has. The same is true in the case of religious education. "An important task of Christian parents is to explain to their children that each Eucharist is at the same time a school of love for God and for man (...) Family preparation for the Eucharistic life should include at least

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, Rome 1981, ed. Polish, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html) (henceforth: FC), 39.

<sup>4</sup> See A. Skreczko, *Zadania rodziny jako domowego Kościoła*, "Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej" 2009, Vol. 8, pp. 112-121.

<sup>5</sup> See R. Buchta, *Mistagogia w polskiej refleksji i praktyce katechetyczno-duszpasterskiej po II Soborze Watykańskim*, Katowice 2017, p. 449.

<sup>6</sup> FC 61.

three important elements: introducing – especially small children – to participate in the Holy Mass, fruitful preparation for First Holy Communion, as well as preparation for mature use of the Eucharist<sup>7</sup>. The Polish catechetical directory, following the Code of Canon Law and other documents, even states that the work of parents to raise children (including religious education) is an obligation, and its implementation should take place at the dawn of childhood. Specific obligations owed to parents include: caring for the preparation of children for First Holy Communion and the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, attending religious classes and participating in catechetical ministry in the parish, as well as participating in religious practices and the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church<sup>8</sup>.

The educational tasks of the family, also understood in the religious aspect, were even more pronounced in the latest *Directory on catechesis*. The narrative style has been slightly changed and instead of family catechesis, the document talks about various scopes of family catechesis – catechesis in the family, with the family, and family catechesis<sup>9</sup>. Catechesis in the family takes place when the family experiences faith and shows love and care for each other in a selfless way. Catechesis with the family is a task for the Church, which, aware of the fact that the parish community is based on these basic communities, should ensure that the catechetical message is addressed to families and strictly relates to the real problems that families face. In turn, family catechesis is understood as any activity serving to deepen faith – both within a given family, but also outside the family's environment. In this way, the family becomes the subject of catechesis and an instrument of evangelization. Apart from the parents, other family members were also appreciated – especially grandparents and godparents. They also became known as catechists. Grandparents emphasize greater time opportunities in shaping their grandchildren's faith and emotional involvement. In turn, godparents are to remain co-workers of parents and witnesses of faith, which obliges them to responsibly choose people to perform this function<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> M. Kobiałka, *Wychowanie dziecka do życia eucharystycznego obowiązkiem rodziców*, in: *Siedem sakramentów świętych w nauczaniu katechetycznym*, ed. H. Słotwińska, Lublin 2007, pp. 309-310 [307-315].

<sup>8</sup> See Polish Episcopal Conference, *Dyrektorium katechetyczne Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce*, Kraków 2001 (henceforth: PDC), 127-128.

<sup>9</sup> See Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis*, Rome 2020, ed. Polish: Kielce 2020 (henceforth: DC), 227-231.

<sup>10</sup> See DC 125-126.

It is worth noticing, that catechetical activity cannot be reduced only to what takes place within the family. As E. Osewska notes, “family catechesis is a general concept referring to catechesis and its relationship with the family. It includes catechetical interactions carried out in the family environment, family cooperation with institutional catechesis, catechetical and pastoral activities undertaken for the family and catechesis for parents, godparents, fiancées and grandparents<sup>11</sup>. Such a view allows us to see, for example, the need for family support from the parish and people with professional training in catechism. Sometimes, when holding families accountable for fulfilling their obligation to raise children in the faith, they do not take into account the fact that not all parents feel competent in undertaking this task. That’s why it’s so important for them to get the right help first. For this reason, meetings with parents organized in the course of preparation for full participation in the Eucharist cannot be limited in terms of content to organizational issues. It would seem that today – in the age of the Internet and a rich offer also addressed to families, catechetical meetings for parents will no longer be so necessary. Nothing could be further from the truth – regardless of any other forms of support, the parish is obliged to care for those who belong to it.

## The role of the parish in Eucharistic formation

The parish’s participation in preparing families for children’s First Holy Communion and the responsibility for this preparation result from the fact that the parish is a Eucharistic congregation. As noted by Fr. R. Zielasko, on the one hand, the parish is the most appropriate entity for the celebration of the Eucharist, on the other hand, “the parish lives and grows primarily through the celebration of the Eucharist”<sup>12</sup>. He even added that the Eucharist *makes* and actualizes the parish, and if so, all participants should be properly prepared to participate in it in accordance with their assigned tasks – priests, liturgical service and all the faithful people, including families.

A consistent translation of the Holy Mass and participation in it in both directions – to God and to man – will reveal each time (...) that the celebration of the Eucharist has serious consequences in the everyday life of the faithful, that the Holy Mass The Church demands the Mass of

<sup>11</sup> E. Osewska, *Katecheza rodzinna w polskich dokumentach katechetycznych*, “Studia nad Rodziną” 2003, Vol. 7, pp. 36 [35-38].

<sup>12</sup> R. Zielasko, *Parafia jako zgromadzenie eucharystyczne*, “Studia Theologica Varsaviensia” 1968, Vol. 6, pp. 75-76 [75-105].

life, a life shaped in the spirit of obedience to the Father and a sincere effort to love other people<sup>13</sup>.

This connection of the Eucharist with everyday life is one of the arguments in favor of experiencing faith in one's own parish – then important days and family celebrations are celebrated in this specific community, and other parishioners participate in them with prayer. On the other hand, participation in the Eucharist – the sign of peace given to members of the same community standing nearby or the prayer of the intention given by the priest – are concrete ways of helping the faithful who may live next door or work in the same place or – in the case of children and young people – study in the same class.

Since the evangelization and catechetical service of the “domestic church” grows and comes from the unique mission of the Church and is subordinated to the building of the one Body of Christ, it should remain in internal communion and responsible harmony with all other ministries of evangelization and catechesis, present and active in the ecclesial community, both diocesan and as well as parish<sup>14</sup>.

Therefore, the fundamental requirement to prepare for and receive the sacraments in one's own parish is not accidental. It can even be said that the responsibility of the parish for the family and the responsibility of the family for the parish must go hand in hand – by deepening the religious awareness of its faithful and supporting them in fulfilling the tasks of the first educators in the faith, the parish community strengthens itself. The catechetical offer of the parish should

<sup>13</sup> There. As the author further notes, “This purpose will be served by various meetings of individual groups of the parish family (young people, children, parents, people living alone, etc.), as well as social and entertainment meetings. The spirit of the parish community will manifest itself and at the same time strengthen and deepen in various social and charitable actions, e.g. towards the sick, the elderly, large families, etc. However, all this will have its source in the parish celebration of the Eucharist and will in turn lead to it.

<sup>14</sup> FC 53. A similar position was expressed, among others, in the Polish catechetical directory, see PDK 107. It happens that parents, e.g. of children attending private schools, prefer Eucharistic formation in the school parish. Apart from special schools, which sometimes decide on such a solution due to the preparation of the pastor, this solution is not only unjustified, but also will not bring the expected results. D. Dudoit expressed her opinion on this matter quite fundamentally Raiche: “Some opt for a liturgical celebration with classmates or family for reasons of social comfort. However well-intentioned this practice may be, in fact, it works the child and the family of an authentic ecclesial experience that is bigger than one small group. D. Dudoit Raiche, *Liturgical Catechesis: A Method with Constitutive Elements*, “International Journal of Evangelization and Catechetics” 2020, Vol. 1, pp. 37-38 [19-43].

not be limited to preparation for the sacraments, although for obvious reasons it cannot be missing then.

The parish should organize meetings of groups of parents who would like to find answers to their educational problems. This is the so-called parish pedagogy of parents. Topics discussed with parents may concern problems encountered in family upbringing, as well as important issues regarding faith life. Parents should be made aware of the importance of meditating on the Word of God, which is an important element of upbringing, and the systematic use of the sacraments<sup>15</sup>.

The key role of the parish in Eucharistic formation should be considered in a slightly broader context – its catechetical tasks in general. It is never enough to remind Pope John Paul II who indicated that parish “should become a propagator and inspirer of catechesis (...) it is still a place where Christians, even non-practicing ones, are united in close bonds”<sup>16</sup>. The role of the parish community increases even more in the context of Eucharistic formation. As the Polish Pope emphasized, “a parish is a community of the baptized who express and confirm their identity primarily through the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice”<sup>17</sup>. This requires the presence of a priest, so the family as a domestic church cannot do without the parish in this respect.

Preparation for the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist takes place indirectly during religious education at school, while direct introduction to the mystery of these sacraments should generally take place in the parish of the student’s place of residence<sup>18</sup>.

This statement is obvious to people who consciously live their faith in the parish community and identify with this community. Those who only come to the parish as guests or even choose any church on the occasion of holidays and celebrations will not see the point in the above-mentioned regulations, and will also be critical of the need to obtain the consent of their own parish priest to receive the sacrament outside the parish. However, if the time of preparation for full participation in the Eucharist is not the only time when the family comes to

<sup>15</sup> A. Skreczko, *Parafia jako środowisko wychowawczego wsparcia rodziców*, “Studia nad Rodziną” 2013, Vol. 17, pp. 285 [277-289].

<sup>16</sup> CT 67.

<sup>17</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Rome 2003, ed. Polish, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_20030417\\_ecc-de-euch.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecc-de-euch.html), 32.

<sup>18</sup> Polish Episcopal Conference, *Podstawa programowa katechezy Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce*, Częstochowa 2018 (henceforth: CCP), p. 49.

church, it is known that it is in this particular community that further Eucharistic life will be practiced (at least in the near future).

Parish catechesis preparing for the sacrament of penance and reconciliation and the Eucharist should be spiritual in nature. The child should systematically participate in Sunday Mass and services related to the liturgical year (rosary, Stations of the Cross, May services, etc.) and in thematic meetings<sup>19</sup>.

Since the preparation concerns a student of the third grade of primary school, i.e. at the age of eight or nine, in many cases he will not come to church on his own, which, from the very beginning, indicates the need to involve someone close to him, and therefore assumes cooperation between the groups. The attitude with which the child will participate in the liturgy and services is also important. If going to church is constantly accompanied by comments from parents who are tired of having to do so or who disregard participation in prayer, the child may easily be influenced by the parents' mood. It is worth noting how uneducational such behavior is, since from an early age the child witnesses discrepancies between declarations and actions, or even adults forcing themselves to follow the rules, which are at the same time ridiculed or disregarded.

## School religion lessons and Eucharistic formation

Since religious classes returned to Polish schools in 1990, families have received additional help in the religious formation of children and youth. The family was still the first catechetical environment, parishes still had their tasks to fulfill, especially as part of Christian initiation, and schools offered age-appropriate content that deepened the understanding of faith and showed the possibility of living it every day. From the very beginning, school religion classes had their own role to play, without denying the need to continue parish catechesis and without depriving parents of their tasks as the first catechists. The relationship between religious lessons and catechesis in the parish is aptly described in the General Directory on Catechesis as a relationship of “complementarity and differentiation”<sup>20</sup>. This relationship is similarly expressed in the latest catechetical document of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization:

<sup>19</sup> *Indications of the Polish Episcopal Conference...*, 26.

<sup>20</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, Rome 1997, ed. Polish: Poznań 1998, no. 73.



teaching the Catholic religion at school (...) is distinguished from catechesis and at the same time complementary to it. Where the distinction is not clear, there is a risk that they will lose their identity<sup>21</sup>.

The need to both participate in religious classes and participate in parish catechesis has been repeatedly expressed in the Episcopate's statements. The latest guidelines also emphasize that preparation for full participation in the Eucharist at every stage – further, closer and direct – is achieved both through school religious education and parish catechesis<sup>22</sup>. This is consistent with the assumptions of the *Core Curriculum for Catechesis of the Catholic Church in Poland*, according to which “Preparation for the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist takes place indirectly during religious education at school, while direct introduction to the mystery of these sacraments should generally take place in the parish of the student's place of residence. There should also be concern for sanctification, for deepening the Eucharistic life after receiving the First Holy Communion<sup>23</sup>. It is emphasized that catechetical meetings in parishes cannot duplicate religion classes in formal and methodological terms.

School religion lessons in grades 1-4 of primary school, in terms of curriculum assumptions, are part of the catechesis of initiation into the sacrament of penance and reconciliation and the Eucharist. It is

an introduction to the basic content of faith and an awakening of trust in God. The sources of knowledge are in particular: the Bible, liturgy and students' experiences. Catechesis focused on the Person and teaching of Jesus Christ is intended to support students in building a system of values, shaping attitudes consistent with their faith and celebrating saving events in the liturgical year<sup>24</sup>.

The catechetical goals, equivalent to the general goals in the first four grades of primary school, are preparation for the sacraments of penance and reconciliation and the Eucharist, showing God's love in the gifts of life, baptism and faith, introducing the mysteries of the liturgical year, shaping conscience, leading to an encounter with God in prayer, education for community life in the family, school and parish, as well as shaping Eucharistic attitudes and attitudes of witness<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> DC 313.

<sup>22</sup> *Indications of the Polish Episcopal Conference...*, no. 13.

<sup>23</sup> CCP, p. 49.

<sup>24</sup> CCP, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> See CCP, pp. 31-32.

Although in the light of the latest core curriculum, the first Holy Communion is administered at the end of the third grade of primary school, the first educational stage has been extended by an additional year. After the modification of a similar document in 2010, the program clearly lacked time to discuss the Holy Mass with students from a new perspective – after they began their Eucharistic life. The concept of such an approach becomes better understood after analyzing the slogans for the individual classes of this stage, the title of which is *Invited to a Feast with Jesus*<sup>26</sup>. The first three classes of the stage are used to prepare for the sacraments of penance and reconciliation and the Eucharist and have the following titles: class I – *God our Father*; class II – *God gives us his Son – Jesus*; class III – *Jesus comes to us*. Jesus, who comes in the Eucharist, helps children every day – it is important that they learn to notice this truth in their lives and seek the presence of Jesus and friendship with Him. The motto of the fourth year is *I want to live with Jesus*, and the task of religious education is to lead students to such a declaration.

The special role of the current core curriculum for catechesis of the Catholic Church in Poland, and, following it, the religious education program prepared by the Commission for Catholic Education, is to restore Eucharistic attitudes as important for the religious formation of children who begin full participation in the Holy Mass. Eucharistic education based on such attitudes was postulated by, among others, priest Jan Charytański, noting that it is a multi-faceted task.

It includes correct information about the entire theology of the Eucharist, takes into account the development of awareness of the encounter, the relationship of the Eucharist with the Church and human life, and finally takes seriously the education of Eucharistic attitudes<sup>27</sup>.

In his publications, he discussed several of them in more detail – the attitude of co-offering, the attitude towards the Word of God, the attitude of unity and love, and the attitude of gratitude<sup>28</sup>. In the context of these attitudes, it is difficult to ignore school religion classes, because this is where the content is taught, including content related

<sup>26</sup> See Catholic Education Commission of the Polish Episcopal Conference, *Program nauczania religii rzymskokatolickiej w przedszkolach i szkołach*, Częstochowa 2018, p. 39 ff. (henceforth: RCP).

<sup>27</sup> J. Charytański, *Wychowanie eucharystyczne po I Komunii św.*, “Katecheta” 1988 Vol. 1, pp. 28 [23-28].

<sup>28</sup> See A. Rayzacher-Majewska, *Aktualność refleksji katechetycznej ks. prof. Jana Charytańskiego*, “Studia Katechetyczne” 2022, Vol. 18, p. 32.

to Eucharistic attitudes – students get to know them and learn from examples how to shape these attitudes in their own lives.

Because attitude is something permanent, its development requires regularity and systematic work. It cannot also take place only in a purely theoretical way, hence the demand to continue religious formation after receiving the First Holy Communion, when the child already experiences what he has learned over the past three years. For this reason, there is a disturbing tendency observed in Poland, according to which parents withdraw their children from religion classes in the fourth grade of primary school, i.e. right after they are able to fully participate in the Holy Mass. The motives for this behavior are very different – sometimes withdrawal from religion is a confirmation of insufficient religious formation and immaturity of parents who, wanting their child to receive further holy sacraments, met the formal requirement of the child's participation in religious classes. Other times, parents succumb to the persuasion of a child who, like their peers who do not attend religious classes, wants to have more free time. Finally, it happens – and these are particularly painful cases – that practicing parents, involved in movements or communities, resign from their child's participation in religious classes, claiming that this subject does not translate into deepening the student's faith. This last approach proves how poorly understood religion lessons, which are an important form of catechetical influence. It is often unjustifiably identified with full catechesis. This contradicts the optics of the catechetical documents of the universal Church and Church in Poland, which clearly demarcates two areas of activity and two different forms of the ministry of the Word. Catechesis is traditionally defined, following Pope John Paul II, as the education of children, youth and adults in the faith<sup>29</sup>. As the Pope further specifies, it includes primarily the teaching of Christian doctrine, generally transmitted in a systematic and comprehensive manner, in order to introduce believers to the fullness of Christian life. The differences between religious lessons and catechesis are most visible in the context of the recipients and the functions of catechesis extracted from the above definition – upbringing, teaching and initiation. Since catechesis is to be an education in faith, it is assumed that its addressees will be believers. In the case of school religion classes, there is no such reservation, and it is even emphasized that every student has the right to participate in them, regardless of their declaration of faith or level of religiosity. For this reason, religious practices and involvement in parish life are not

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<sup>29</sup> CT 18.

subject to assessment if they are not related to the teaching content and verification of knowledge or skills.

Of the three functions of catechesis at school, it is fully possible to implement the didactic function as part of religion classes. To some extent, the school also creates the opportunity to perform an educational function, as evidenced by the attitudes that are new in the latest curriculum documents. Although attitudes are not subject to school assessment, when conducting classes, a religion teacher should strive to develop such attitudes in students, closely related to the topic of a given lesson. This is an analogous situation to shaping patriotic attitudes in other lessons. Finally, the initiatory – initiating – function of catechesis requires, in order to be fully achieved, a community of faith and involvement in experiencing the saving mysteries through the liturgy and sacraments. Therefore, its implementation can only take place in a parish community that has resources for Christian initiation. It is worth noting that whether school and religious classes will serve an initiatory function, even to the slightest extent, depends on many factors. First of all, it depends on the catechist. If he teaches as a witness and shares his faith with students, encouraging them to follow him and leading them into the parish community, we can talk about a certain fulfillment of the initiatory function.

Such assumptions underlying the organization of religious classes are not widely known, and therefore parents have different attitudes towards these classes. Meanwhile, knowledge about the complementarity and differentiation between catechesis and religion lessons, as well as awareness of the possibilities of implementing individual functions of catechesis within various forms of the ministry of the Word, could contribute to a different perception of the classes discussed. Meanwhile, there are parents whose greater catechetical involvement takes place only during the school year in which their children are directly preparing for the First Holy Communion and ends in the same year.

As Pope John Paul II noted, “alongside the family and in connection with it, the school offers opportunities for catechesis that are not to be despised”<sup>30</sup>. Both in relation to the family and the parish, in catechetical program documents regarding school religious lessons there is an expectation of cooperation between communities, because only such action can bring lasting effects. The family should be involved in the cycle of Eucharistic formation at every stage.

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<sup>30</sup> CT 69.

During regular meetings with parents of children in grades I-III, we should strive to deepen our faith through appropriately selected topics (signs of faith, sin and conversion, the Eucharistic gathering and participation in it, everyday life of faith) and experiencing Holy Mass. and participation in the celebration of the word of God<sup>31</sup>.

It is important that the time spent with parents is not limited to discussing organizational issues. Parents have the right to receive appropriate assistance in fulfilling their duties, and this undoubtedly includes the religious upbringing of their children. Sometimes they are held accountable for failing to complete tasks, but sometimes it is difficult for them to be held accountable for their lack of skills or knowledge since they have not been previously prepared for their roles. Therefore, it will be much better to treat the time of preparing their children for full participation in the Eucharist as an opportunity for adult catechesis.

## The optimal model of cooperation between catechetical communities

Although for nearly 25 years catechetical documents have indicated the need for multi-stage preparation of families for children's First Holy Communion, including both religious teaching in kindergarten and primary school, as well as catechetical meetings in the parish, it is only recently that a more widespread implementation of these assumptions has been observed in practice. The instructions regarding the stages of this preparation clearly indicate the need to involve all three catechetical communities – the family, the parish and the school. According to the guidelines of the Episcopate, these stages are as follows:

- a) further preparation, which begins in early childhood and involves religious upbringing in the family, regular participation in Sunday and holiday Masses, and then attending religion classes at school;
- b) closer preparation consisting in the child's participation in religious education and in parish catechesis planned for the first and second grades of primary school, which is an introduction to sacramental catechesis;
- c) Direct preparation takes place in grade III and still involves participation in religious education and parish sacramental catechesis. This preparation should be primarily of a spiritual nature, aimed at gaining personal religious experience and joining the

<sup>31</sup> CCP, p. 49.

community of believers. The essence of this preparation is to deepen faith in the real presence of Jesus in Holy Communion and to arouse the desire to receive it<sup>32</sup>.

Although for a long time preparation for First Holy Communion was limited to direct preparation, the insufficiency of this model is increasingly observed. It is true that there are families for whom even participating in monthly meetings in the year preceding the reception of the First Holy Communion is a great burden and is met with reluctance by those interested, especially in connection with the requirement to attend Holy Mass every week. Experience to date encourages us to renew the model of preparation for full participation in the Eucharist as soon as possible, but the activities cannot be limited only to children or even their parents. Sometimes people talk about the need to develop Eucharistic culture in the parish. It involves taking the following steps: helping people understand the essential connection between catechesis and sacramental life; enabling children, youth and adults to adore the Blessed Sacrament as often as possible; linking other topics with the liturgy (an important recommendation for the school); bringing people to church when the liturgical year is discussed; teaching about the Holy Mass as an encounter with God and teaching the Lord's Prayer<sup>33</sup>.

Probably extending the time of preparation for full participation in the Eucharist, and in principle – implementation in accordance with the guidelines, and therefore lasting from the first grade of primary school, would meet with resistance from some parents, but there would certainly be some who would be happy to use it, and over time perhaps they would join in conducting the meetings. It must be admitted that the time spent on preparations is closely related to their fruitfulness. Therefore, if families become active once a month during the school year in which the child receives the First Holy Communion, it is understandable that sometimes the first Communion almost becomes the last. The ceremony of receiving Jesus in the Eucharist is sometimes treated as the finish line, the end of a certain stage. Meanwhile, the perception of Eucharistic formation should be changed – both by those responsible for it and by the parents themselves. At the same time, an opposite tendency is visible – involvement in this formation and its responsible tact translates into further religious practices of entire families.

<sup>32</sup> *Indications of the Polish Episcopal Conference...*, no. 13.

<sup>33</sup> W. O'Leary, *Creating a Eucharistic Culture*, <https://www.catechist.com/creating-eucharistic-culture>.

Proposals of several years of preparation for the Eucharistic life have appeared at least since 2001, when the then religious education curriculum proposed topics for meetings with parents and children for all years of primary school education, but pastoral and catechetical practice did not follow suit. An important attempt to change this situation was the introduction of obligatory parish catechesis in the Archdiocese of Warmia from September 1, 2015<sup>34</sup>. It can be said that the following years, in which greater distancing was observed from involvement in Eucharistic formation, together with new catechesis program documents, contributed to the intensification of activities in this field. Educational packages for learning religion included the so-called “household materials” or other materials addressed to parents, with suggestions for including them in the religious upbringing of their children. Recently, materials for parish catechesis have become groundbreaking, according to current Polish catechetical documents intended for the first four years of primary school education.

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Materials for parish catechesis should provide for a two-pronged impact – both on children and parents, while offering them the opportunity to meet together in the temple so that they can participate in the liturgy or services together. Due to the widespread access to various auxiliary materials, magazines and religious publications, these materials must be of a high editorial standard and contain interesting methodological proposals. This is a challenge since students receive so many interesting methodological proposals at school in religious education textbooks. Materials for parish catechesis should be different from them, and at the same time arouse the interest and sympathy of the recipients. Parents deserve their own help, in which they will receive answers or hints on issues related to religious upbringing and living faith on a daily basis. According to the Church’s recommendations, parish catechesis for parents should take place in smaller groups to enable establishing relationships and encourage participants to share their testimony. Even if not all parents decide to participate in such catechesis from the first year of its duration, those who take advantage of it will, with each subsequent year, become more and more confident in themselves and more and more confident of their competences as the first catechists.

The Eucharistic formation of a child carried out through cooperation between catechetical communities has another important value

<sup>34</sup> Bielinowicz wrote more on this topic, *Systematyczna katecheza parafialna dzieci i młodzieży w Archidiecezji Warmińskiej w świetle dekretu metropolity warmińskiego z 2015 roku*, “Studia Katechetyczne” 2016, Vol. 12, pp. 139-152.

that cannot be omitted in the light of the Directory on Catechesis. The involvement of the family, parish and school in education in the faith is a real opportunity to conduct permanent catechesis, going well beyond preparation for the sacraments. Deepening baptismal awareness and developing Eucharistic attitudes will become a natural consequence of the sacraments experienced in the Church community – also in the family as the domestic Church. Thus, it will fulfill the mystagogical postulate, which in the assumptions of the program is intended for the period of learning in grades 5-8 of primary school, while at the same time enriching the content provided for in the program with inclusion in the life of the community and experiencing the mysteries of faith in it. Such action will correspond to the pedagogy of initiation inspired by the catechumenal path, as called for by the new catechetical directory<sup>35</sup>.

The optimal model of cooperation between catechetical communities for the Eucharistic formation of children assumes the involvement of representatives of the family, parish and school. Each of them should join in with the awareness of creating a catechizing and catechized community. There may be significant differences in the level of faith and religious awareness among meeting participants.

The community should support parents' involvement in their children's journey of initiation; For some parents it is an opportunity to deepen their faith, and for others it is a real space for the first proclamation<sup>36</sup>.

At the same time, expanding the parish's offer and extending preparation for First Holy Communion for several years may actually translate into greater effectiveness of these preparations. An expanded group of people involved in the meetings will create the opportunity for dialogue and sharing faith, as well as establishing relationships based on Gospel values, which is of great importance in today's reality. The cooperation of the three catechetical circles organized in this way will be a response to the demands of the current catechetical documents and the invitation of Pope John Paul II, who called on all those responsible for catechesis:

Truly, I want to pour courage, hope and enthusiasm into the hearts of all these – and there are so many of them and so various – who devote themselves to religious teaching and preparing souls to live according to the Gospel<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> More on this topic can be found in DC 64-65. Due to its importance, this issue deserves more extensive treatment in a separate article.

<sup>36</sup> DC 232.

<sup>37</sup> CT 62.



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